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A Message from the Military Health System Leadership

Filed under LEADERSHIP

(NO COMMENTS)

Military Health System Team,

As *military* health professionals, we are called upon to be both healers and leaders.

Paramount to our strategic priorities is the core mission to ensure the health and readiness of our forces. As leaders we have more than an obligation to ensure health and readiness, we have an obligation to model behavior that produces health and readiness.

According to the World Bank, our nation now spends almost 20 percent of our gross domestic product on health care. Over one third of the entire US population is overweight or obese. The rapidly rising health care cost growth in DoD is also well documented. And, in both spheres, rapidly rising health care spending diverts funding from other priorities. Among DoD beneficiaries, non-communicable diseases, which are largely preventable, are cutting into readiness and training by their exorbitant and rapidly increasing cost. We have the requirement to change the trajectory of cost growth with changes in lifestyle and by embracing healthy behaviors.

Earlier this year, the Department launched Operation Live Well, a DoD initiative in which all sectors of the military community – from commanders and commissaries, hospitals and health and wellness centers, and our colleagues in the Morale Welfare and Recreation type programs – contribute to the health of the individuals and families we all serve. The focus on active living, healthy eating, tobacco free lifestyles, and mental and emotional well-being will help increase the health and wellness of the total force. It is an education, outreach and behavior change initiative that aligns with the strategies of the Affordable Care Act and the National Prevention Strategy – efforts that aim to move the nation away from a health care system focused on sickness and disease, to one focused on wellness and prevention.

We know that improving health takes more than just medical leadership. It requires a community-wide approach involving all people – families, friends, coworkers and commanders – and integrating the resources we have at our disposal. We must influence the rest of the 525,000 minutes that a patient is not with a provider to improve health.

Our outreach in Operation Live Well is much more than just words of encouragement. We’re bringing science and online assistance to the fight – harnessing the best tools and practices already available in the federal government, from DoD to the Department of Agriculture. Some of these resources can be found at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/olw> and http://www.health.mil/News_And_Multimedia/Special_Features/operationlivewell.aspx

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In support of Operation Live Well, in March, the Department announced the Healthy Base Initiative (HBI) — a demonstration project being implemented at 13 diverse locations that include all Military Departments and the Coast Guard, in urban, rural and overseas communities. The impact on National Security caused by unhealthy and sedentary lifestyles is directly being addressed. Focused areas on tobacco cessation, increasing physical activity, weight loss, and improved nutritional programs are at the center of this initiative.

The Defense Health Headquarters in Falls Church, Va. is one of the 13 installations. We asked to be included in this demonstration project — acknowledging our role as leaders and role models, both organizationally and as individuals, and our personal responsibility in improving health.

Although the Defense Health Headquarters will be a focus for the Healthy Base Initiative for measurement, every medical commander and leader in the Military Health System must start taking steps today to improve health in their communities. Let’s continue to implement initiatives that encourage healthy behaviors, not just in our medical facilities, but throughout an installation. Make the healthy choice an easier choice and let your community know that “your health is our best defense.”

We all have a vital leadership role to play in this national effort, and in the months ahead, the MHS leadership will spotlight the programs, such as the US Army’s focus on the Performance Triad, and other tools and initiatives that work well, and will recommend rapid adoption and sharing of these across our system of health.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Woodson, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs

LTG Patricia Horoho, Surgeon General, United States Army

VADM Matthew Nathan, Surgeon General, United States Navy

Lt Gen Thomas Travis, Surgeon General, United States Air Force

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